



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 16, 2011

Contact: Mike Henderson, Public Health Nurse, 457-8914 or 443-2584

Health Officials Urge Vaccination Against Highly Contagious Pertussis

An outbreak of whooping cough, or pertussis, in at least three Montana counties has highlighted the importance of vaccination to stop the spread of the highly contagious disease.

Three cases of pertussis have been confirmed so far this month in Lewis and Clark County, according to Mike Henderson, public health nurse with the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department. Numerous other cases have surfaced in Gallatin and Park counties.

Pertussis is a serious bacterial illness that can easily spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes. People sick with pertussis have severe coughing attacks that can last for months. Antibiotics are used to treat the disease.

“If you or your child has been coughing for two weeks with no improvement, be suspicious,” Henderson said. “If there’s vomiting associated with the cough or if the coughing gets worse at night, consider that it might be pertussis.

“Common-sense measures can keep disease from spreading,” he added. “Stay home or keep your child home until you see your health-care provider, and teach your children to cover their cough and wash their hands. The longer pertussis goes untreated, the more it spreads.”

Pertussis can cause serious illness, especially in babies too young to be immunized. More than half of all infants who get the disease must be hospitalized, and 10 infants died from pertussis last year in California. Because adults and older children can spread the disease to infants, the local health department recommends immunization to protect vulnerable members of the community.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following vaccination schedule:

- **Children:** Children need five DTaP immunizations to get full protection. Shots should be administered at 2, 4, and 6 months of age; between the ages of 15 and 18 months; and again about the time the child starts kindergarten.
- **Teens and pre-teens:** A booster shot, called a Tdap, is recommended at about age 11 or 12. If an adolescent was not fully vaccinated as a child, talk to your health-care provider about catch-up doses.
- **Adults:** The easiest thing for adults to do is to get the Tdap booster instead of the regular tetanus booster, which is recommended for adults every 10 years. Tdap provides protection against tetanus and diphtheria as well as pertussis. Adults who didn't get a Tdap booster as a pre-teen or teen should get one as soon as possible.

- **Pregnant women:** Pregnant women who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose during the third trimester or late second trimester or right after delivery. Maternal pertussis antibodies transfer to the newborn and may provide protection against pertussis before the baby starts getting its own DTaP vaccines.

For more information, contact your health-care provider or the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department, 443-2584, or visit www.cdc.gov/Features/Pertussis/

The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.